

Women's History Still in the Making

(Syndicated News) March is a national celebration of women's history, and of those women who successfully blazed the trail in prior generations. But battles are still being fought in the name of gender equity.

One constant battle is to rectify the gender pay gap. Women are still being paid less money for the same work and credentials. Surprisingly, the nations' Universities have emerged as hotbeds for sexual harassment and discrimination. The unprecedented resignation of Larry Summers as president of Harvard last week followed his controversial public statements that men are better than women in science because of genetics.

One person with first-hand experience is Dr. Graciela Chichilnisky, the UNESCO Professor of Mathematics and Economics at Columbia University. She authored the Kyoto Protocol main feature, its Global Markets for Emissions Trading. Despite her worldwide reputation, Dr. Chichilnisky has been fighting a battle at Columbia for many years trying to bridge the pay gap between men and women.

"There is a serious problem within the university system across the country," explains Dr. Chichilnisky, "and I'm working to try to help improve those conditions. The glass ceiling damages many women and their families, and we all need to work together to change that."

The American Association of University Women finds that two thirds of all female students suffer sexual harassment, and the American Association of University Professors ranks Columbia University as the second worst Ivy League in terms of gender discrimination in salaries. According to their data, while male professors at Columbia are earning around \$143,000 per year, their female counterparts are earning \$128,000, and the gap is still growing.

Chichilnisky thought she had won the battle when a 1995 federal court case settlement awarded her \$500,000 in damages, and almost doubled her salary. The University promised to provide Dr. Chichilnisky funding and space for her research center. One would think that the settlement would have corrected the problems and it would be the end of the issue. But that's just not the case.

"The University breached every term of my 1995 settlement," explains Dr. Chichilnisky, "including \$350,000 lack of payment of my compensation, and deliberately froze millions of dollars of my own research grants under false pretences." In March 2000 the Supreme Court of the State of New York provided an injunction to stop Columbia University from illegal actions.

Last September Columbia removed Dr. Chichilnisky from her campus offices without any warning, making her the only professor without an office. "The working conditions of many women at Columbia are a living hell," adds Dr. Chichilnisky, "when all we are trying to do is create a fair and equal playing ground between men and women."

In early March 2006 her case for gender discrimination, retaliation, and breach of contract was in the Supreme Court of the State of New York.

She is still in the making of great women's history. In years to come, women around the country will respect and celebrate the struggle that she continues to fight today on behalf of women everywhere.